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AUTHOR Novak, John M.
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ABSTRACT

The paper argues that the theory and practice of invitational education (which is an experiment in cooperative living) can be better articulated and implemented if its foundations and range are re-examined. Using a constructivist-critical method of analysis, the Snygg-Combs theory of perception is shown to be lacking as foundation because of its inadequate social dimension. Next, the wide-lens view of inviting success is contrasted with the context specific model for inviting educative events. It is suggested that they are complementary. Finally, the dimensions of skills, crafts, and art are analyzed and shown to be key concepts for developing an integrated invitational theory of educational practice. A diagram, footnotes, and bibliography are included. (Author/TRS)

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Toward an integrated theory of inviting:

Skills, craft, and art

by

John M. Novak
College of Education
Brock University
St. Catharines, Ontario
Canada, L2S 3A1

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Abstract

This paper argues that the theory and practice of invitational education can be better articulated and implemented if its foundations and range are re-examined. Using a constructivist-critical method of analysis, the Snygg-Combs theory of perception is shown to be lacking as a foundation because of its inadequate social dimension. Next, the wide-lens view of inviting success is contrasted with the context specific model for inviting educative events. It is suggested that they are complementary. Finally, the dimensions of skills, craft, and art are analyzed and shown to be key concepts for developing an integrated invitational theory of educational practice.

Invitational education, like democracy, is an experiment in cooperative living. It sets as its operational ideal the notion that people can come together, without coercion or manipulation, and find ways to mutually solve problems, share, and grow. Like democracy, attempts to seek ultimate justification for it as a worthwhile endeavor are probably counter-productive and based on straw-man arguments. After all, who can really be opposed to the general and basic principle of systematically sending affirmative messages so that people can realize more of their potential? However, what invitational education presently needs is better articulation of its basic concepts and suggested practices so that it can be more adequately applied to the varied and complex problems educators presently face. This seems especially important as work is now beginning for a third edition of Inviting School Success.

The method used in this paper to articulate the basic concepts of invitational education will center on the tension between its constructivist-critical dynamics. Building on a previous work (Novak, 1985) this method claims that an inviting theory of educational practice can be better articulated by focusing on the tension between what it is for and what it is against - what it says "Yes" to and what it says "No" to; what it speaks to and what it is silent about. Paying serious attention to, and building on this tension can work to prevent this theory of practice from becoming either a series of reassuring generalities or a list of woeful lamentations. This method then will be applied to the following tension areas of invitational education: its roots,

range, and potential integration of skills, craft, and art. Let's first turn to the roots of invitational education.

Roots

> A good theory, like a good parent, should
> give its offspring both roots and wings.

The Second Edition of Inviting School Success (Purkey and Novak, 1984) states that "invitational education has its roots in the perceptual approach to understanding human behavior" (p. 22). While acknowledging a long list of perceptualists, including James, Mead, Kelly, and Rogers, special emphasis is placed on the Snygg-Combs theory of perception. This has had both advantages and disadvantages.

The strength of the Snygg-Combs approach is that it pays particular attention to the intricacies of individual perception and behavior. This is not to be downplayed. Historically, it was an important and critical reaction to the one-dimensional and mechanistic interpretation of people supplied by behaviorism. By providing a basis for understanding the workings of a person's self-concept, the Snygg-Combs theory of perception presented a framework for those working in the helping professions. However, the discourse (Bernstein, 1983; Bredo and Feinberg, 1982; Harre, 1979, 1983; Sullivan, 1984) on the nature of the personal world has moved well beyond the battle with behaviorism to the realm of the social. A theory of inviting which keeps its roots in individual behavior and the helping relationship will be seriously limited, both theoretically and practically.

As I see it, inviting is essentially a communicative form of purposive action; it is an action done between, by, and with people.

Thus by its very nature it focuses on the dynamics of the shared, the symbolic, and the situated. Let me briefly elaborate on these points.

An invitation is a form of communication. To become meaningful it must be understandable to the participants of a situation - it must be held in common or shared. This process of sharing involves using symbols (language, gestures, icons, etc.) which are meaningful to the participants and point to the desirability of being mutually involved in this process. Finally, it needs to be recognized that shared, symbolic activities are always situated; they occur in a particular place, at a particular time. Paying attention to the context means that those doing the inviting need to be able to comfortably function within, and reflect on the situation they find themselves in. This means being aware of the special flavour of the historical, cultural, and interpersonal dynamics at work in a situation.

Stated another way, the social nature of inviting builds on the contention that since, in some very important ways, we are all in this together, what can we do to make it worthwhile to all involved? It argues that inviting means be used in seeking inviting ends. Certainly something like this was intended when the metaphor of the inviting family was chosen to represent the model for tomorrow's schools. This emphasis on the doing with nature of inviting certainly takes us beyond the Snygg-Combs theory of individual perception and points us in the direction of concerns raised by such social theorists as George Herbert Mead (the idea of symbolic interaction), John Dewey (the relationship of communication, common, and community), Jurgen Habermas (the nature of undistorted communication), John Rawls (the social foundations of justice), and Nel Noddings (the dynamics of caring). Obviously the implication of this social turn for the foundations of an

inviting theory of educational practice will have implications that cannot be fully explored in this paper.[1] However, one area that can be touched upon is the range of such a theory.

Range

> If there are genuine uncertainties in life,
> philosophies must reflect that uncertainty.
>
> John Dewey

What should be the focus and range of an inviting theory of educational practice? Presently there seem to be two ways of answering this question. One approach, suggested in the work of Purkey and Schmidt (in press), involves using a general invitational model to provide an integrative setting for the various actions educators consider. In contrast to this wide-lens view, a context specific model for inviting educative events has been suggested (Novak, 1984, 1985). This second perspective argues that there are distinct and unique aspects of educative events that cannot be adequately dealt with through a general model. Let's now look at the strengths and weaknesses of each of these approaches and see if they can be creatively combined.

The strengths of the general invitational model suggested by Purkey and Schmidt are its do-ability, optimism, and connection to other aspects of people's lives. It is able to get a reasonably quick consensus on things people can agree need doing. By adapting a general model of inviting to schools, educators can use suggestions and strategies based on good sense that are usually not systematically applied to people, places, programs, and policies. In many cases this would enable educators to "clean up their acts" and make schools more agreeable

places to be. Although this may be a necessary start, it does not go deep enough into the unique types of problems educators face in a democratic and pluralistic society.

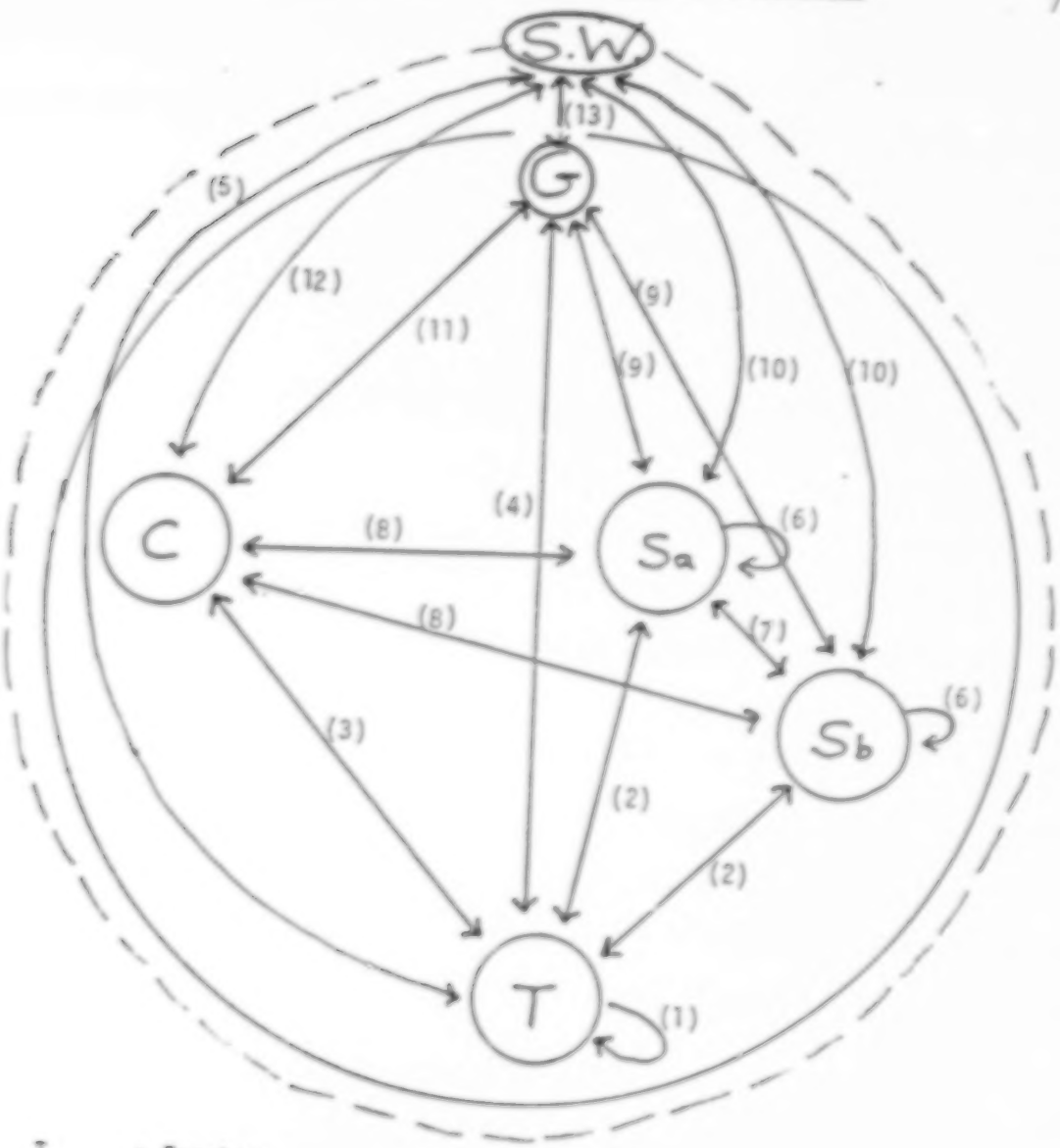
John Dewey pointed out in Experience and Education (1938) that the criteria for judging educative events is that they are agreeable and growth producing. The general invitational model applied to education does a good job of emphasizing his criteria of agreeability; it tends to do this, however, by staying on the surface and neglecting the complex and thorny issues involved in discerning the growth-producing aspects of educative experience. In terms of the language of invitational education, it tends to emphasize the dictum "Invite Success" but neglects thinking too much about the nature of what people are being successful at.

A criticism that can be raised against this general model of inviting success is that it runs the risk of sugar-coating the status quo by enthusiastically endorsing whatever school practices are current and uncontroversial. Focusing on surface agreeability can make it difficult and uncomfortable to go below the surface. For as Charles Sanders Peirce said, "Those who go below the surface do so at their own peril". The tendency to avoid the perilous, the disagreeable, can lead to a type of surface agreeability at the expense of ignoring deeper, more contentious issues. Because of its generality, the wide-lens focus gives the appearance of being busily above the disagreeable fray. However, it misses the detail, texture, and tensions of situated educative events. Since this is not the best of all possible educational worlds, silence on issues of gender[2], race, poverty, and power can leave the general model of inviting inaudible to those who are trying to transform deep seated disinviting practices in and through education.

In contrast to the wide-lens view for invitational education, the context-specific approach can be seen as a special filter which tries to get at the stuff of education. Rather than focusing on the general notion of inviting potential it emphasizes the particular dynamics of inviting educative events. By attempting to differentiate, analyze, and coordinate the specific activities of teaching, learning, curriculum, and governance it seeks to deal with the special quality of educative events.

What is it that makes educative events so special and distinct from other activities? Last year it was argued (Novak, 1985) that an examination of educative events involves attending to the component parts and relationships which work together to affect the process and product of inviting educative events. The following diagram shows some of the relationships involving teachers, students, curriculum, governance, and the social world which can be examined to better understand the intricacies of educative events.

Inviting Educative Events Relational Model



T = Teacher
Sa, Sb = Students
C = Curriculum
G = Governance
S.W. = Social World

1-13 = Relationships

Obviously this is a complex, and perhaps confusing, set of relationships. Perhaps its usefulness can be better illuminated by looking at some questions which can be asked in each of the thirteen relationships shown.

1. Teacher -- Self: What are important self-perceptions for invitational teaching? How is a caring self maintained, protected, and enhanced? What type of invitations are necessary to extend to oneself personally and professionally?
2. Teacher -- Students: What types of invitations communicate that "we are in this together"? What is the difference between the teacher's relationship to students and the student's relationship to the teacher? What types of invitations communicate that delicate balance between threat and challenge? What are the variety of ways teachers can achieve shared meaning with their students?
3. Teacher -- Curriculum: What is the curriculum inviting? Is there a hidden curriculum which disinvites the realization of human potential in certain areas? How are knowledge and value claims constructed and validated? How is knowledge related to social practice?
4. Teacher -- Governance: What are the criteria for deciding if the rules used are inviting educative events to occur? How are teachers involved in the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of rules? What is the difference in role between teachers and educational administrators in inviting educative events?
5. Teachers -- Social World: To what extent do teachers have the desire, skills, and means to participate in issues affecting

the inviting and disinviting aspects of their public life? What is the teacher's relationship to the school system, community, and larger social structure? How do teachers invite and disinvite other teachers?

6. Student -- Self: What does it mean to have a good self-concept-as-learner? How does self-concept-as-learner relate to the development of self as a moral person? How does a student's self-concept-as-learner relate to gender, ethnicity, and social class?

7. Student -- Student: What types of inviting or disinviting messages do students extend to each other? How do age, gender, ethnicity, and social class affect the types of inviting or disinviting messages students extend to each other? Do students see themselves as partners or competitors in learning?

8. Student -- Curriculum: How does the curriculum invite students to become self educating? To what extent does the curriculum relate to the personal world of the students? How do students perceive the meaning of what they are taught?

9. Students -- Governance: To what extent are students invited to participate in the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of school rules? How do students get the information and skills necessary to participate in the formulation of rules? How do students perceive the rules of the school?

10. Students -- Social World: To what extent is the larger culture inviting or disinviting student potential on the basis of gender, ethnicity, or social class? What are the life opportunities available to the students? How do they perceive their life opportunities?

11. Curriculum -- Governance: How is the curriculum selected and implemented in an inviting manner? How is a curriculum evaluated for its invitability? How does using a particular curriculum promote or prevent certain activities?

12. Curriculum -- Social World: Whose knowledge is being invited in the curriculum? How has that knowledge been developed? How does that knowledge affect the workings of the social world?

13. Governance -- Social World: In what ways does the larger society invite or disinvite the construction of educative events? To what extent do educational rules reflect the larger society? Are there conflicts between and within the local communities and the larger society which affect the types of invitations which are possible and desirable?

This diagram and the resultant questions are certainly only a beginning step in examining the various factors which affect inviting educative events. Some of the relationships and questions have already been explored in the discourse of invitational education (e.g. teacher perceptions, self-concept-as-learner) but others have not really been touched upon (e.g. relationships of teachers and students to curriculum, governance and the larger social world). This model expands the range of what can and should be looked at by educators from an inviting perspective. It would also seem to have the possibility of extending the theory by focusing on the tension of present day educative events. But, is what is good for theoreticians necessarily good for practitioners? Does it provide educators with a sense of optimism and do-ability? Obviously this perspective needs a lot more discussion, elaboration and

refinement before it can be systematically applied by educators.

Thus in looking at the wide-lens approach and the context-specific model we run the risk of thinking we have to choose between an optimistic simplification or a pedantic complexity; we run the risk of thinking the choice is between more surface action or more depth thought. Obviously, to paraphrase Immanuel Kant, actions without thought are blind and thoughts without action are empty.

We can do better than this either/or choice by seeing the two approaches as complementary. Like gears, the wide-lens model may be necessary to get us going and may be useful if there is a need to down-shift. The context-specific model may be shifted to when we see ourselves wound out at the lower gear. To shift too early to the higher gear runs the risk of a jerky trip and possibly stalling out; to only stay in the low gear is to run the risk of merely making a lot of noise spinning our wheels and eventually burning out our transmission. The next section will suggest that perhaps a smooth shifting of gears is possible if we see the relationship between inviting skills, craft, and art.

Skills, Craft, and Art

> The art of saying things well is useless
> to a man who has nothing to say.
>
> (Thomas MacAuley)

Building on the analogy of driving a car with a stick shift, skills, craft, and art[3] should not be seen as exclusive categories but rather as successive phases of a process toward sustained movement in a defensible direction. Skills get us going, craft enables us to shift to

a smoother, more efficient level, and art means all systems are operating and we are taking in new sights on the trip. Obviously this mechanical analogy has its limitations. However, it can be useful in pointing out some important dimensions in an inviting theory of educational practice. Let's first look at skills.

Quite simply, skills are basic procedures people can get good at which enable them to get on with that which they consider worth doing. Skills can be modelled, practiced and applied to a wide variety of situations. Ultimately they are most effective if they are internalized and become second nature to the user. If they are used correctly they enable the practitioner to get on with that which is worthwhile. They are misused if they are mechanically applied to every situation. In looking at carpentry, hammering a nail can be seen as a skill.

What are the important skills for inviting educative events? The Second Edition of Inviting School Success (Purkey and Novak, 1984) dedicates a chapter to inviting skills. However, except for a small section on preparing the environment, the chapter focuses entirely on interpersonal activities. Certainly this is a good place to start; but the process cannot end there. If "everything in schools should invite the realization of human potential" (Purkey and Novak, 1984, p. 2), and this includes not only people and places but also the policies and programs, then inviting governance and curriculum skills are needed by educators. Referring to the "Inviting Educative Events Relational Model" presented on page 7, this means that skills related to describing an inviting curriculum, school rules, and public participation in educative affairs need to be delineated. Following the basic classification of skills already used in Inviting School Success (Being Ready, Being With, and Following Through) would seem to be a good place to begin.

Some examples of inviting curriculum skills might include analyzing materials for their sexist or racist overtones (Being Ready), working with diverse community and student groups to develop curriculum materials which pay attention to the historical and cultural perspectives of groups traditionally neglected in the formal curriculum (Being With), and developing inviting evaluation procedures for newly developed materials (Following Through). Starting with inviting skill development can get us going a lot of different ways.

Shifting gears, the notion of craft involves bringing a wide variety of skills together to produce something which would be judged to be done well. Going back to the carpentry analogy, this means coordinating the technical proficiency necessary to build a well-crafted home. Thus, craft involves not only having skills but knowing how and when to use and modify them according to the situation.

The notion of craft in education has received recent attention. Alan Tom (1984), in his book Teaching as a moral craft, uses this metaphor to argue for an understanding of teaching which favours a "reflective, diligent, and skillful approach toward the pursuit of desirable ends" (p. 144). Involved in his notion of craft is a "mixture of mechanical expertise, analytic ability, and adaptability to situational factors" (p. 102) along with "the importance of reflecting on what purposes education is out to serve, and the need to remember the limitations of current knowledge" (p. 144). Thomas Green, in the 1984 John Dewey Lecture, emphasizes the importance of the conscience of craft. He states that:

> We see it whenever the expert of the novice in any craft adopts the standards of that craft as his own. That is to say, it is displayed whenever we become judge in our own case saying that our performance is good or bad, skillful, fitting, and the like. (p. 4)

Thus he adds an important public and self evaluative component to the notion of craft.

Connecting these recent thoughts about craft to the process of inviting educative events involves relating the general skills of inviting to the specific tasks of teaching, learning, curriculum, and governance. The result should be interpersonal practices, school designs, curriculum programs, and school policies which are judged to be done well. In order for the craft of inviting to develop, work on specific inviting criteria and standards needs to be done. A theory of educational practice needs well-crafted exemplars.

The move beyond craft to art is a subtle but necessary shift for the practice and theory of invitational education. Art takes us to and through the well-crafted to the highly creative. For as Dewey (1934) says,

> Craftsmanship to be artistic in the final sense must be 'loving'; it must care deeply for the subject matter upon which skill is exercised.
>
> (p. 48)

This deep caring for the subject matter manifests itself in the following way:

> What happens in the movement of art is the emergence of new materials of experience demanding expression, and therefore involving in their expression new forms and techniques.
>
> (p. 143)

Thus, according to Dewey, the focus of art is on the concrete creation of deeper ways of caring for and experiencing the world.

Returning a final time to the carpentry analogy, an example of a work of art would be the building of a pleasing habitat which is ecologically sound and creative. Those who designed and participate

in the creation experience a deep sense of value and possibility. Things do not look the same anymore; there are new relations established, new horizons to experience, new ways to imagine and do.

The notion of art is important to invitational education because it stresses the need to go beyond the level of competence to the realm of the creative. For educators this involves a deep caring for the stuff and purpose of educative events and the willingness to think and act in creative ways. The artistic test for invitational education is the extent to which it can point to, and participate in, new educative possibilities. This, I have argued, can begin with a wide lens view but needs to shift to a context specific focus because it is difficult to care deeply and attend to the subtleties of things in general. A wide lens view can get things started with people and institutions; a context specific focus can give us some place to go. It will take both working together to make the trip successful, worthwhile, and creative.

Final Statement

It's not enough to do good;
One must do good the right way.

(John Viscount Morley)

This paper has argued that the theory and practice of invitational education can better develop if it pays attention to, and tries to build on, the tension between the individual and social, the agreeable and the growth producing, the general and the context specific, and the efficacious and the artful. It will take the judicious blending of know how (skills) to do well (craft) so we can create with (art) the basic concepts of an inviting theory of educational practice. This

involves working in and through, and not around, the tensions involved in inviting educative events. Although we may have to begin on the surface with the readily agreeable, we need to dig deeper to participate in a better grounded and sustaining vision. What is required is the cooperation of all those who care about invitational education. May the experiment continue in theory, research, and practice.

Footnotes

[1] The notion of the inviting family model for schools is very Deweyan in its origin. The following quotation from Democracy and Education (Dewey, 1916) shows that only part of Dewey's notion was appropriated, the internal relations. What was excluded were the external relations of families and schools. This, I would suggest, has led to a narrowing focus of both invitational education and schools.

> If we take, on the other hand, the kind of family life which illustrates the standard, we find that there are material, intellectual, aesthetic interests in which all participate and that the progress of one member has worth for the experience of other members - it is readily communicable - and that the family is not an isolated whole, but enters intimately into relationships with business groups, with schools, with all the agencies of culture, as well as with other similar groups, and that it plays a due part in the political organization and in return receives support from it. In short, there are many interests consciously communicated and shared; and there are varied and free points of contact with other modes of association.
>
> (p. 83)

[2] The published work on invitational education has not been totally silent on focusing on issues of gender. Judith Stillion (1984) has written an excellent article titled "Women and the inviting process: Special problems and possible solutions". This is certainly a step in the right direction and needs to be followed up.

A particular problem that relates to invitational education and gender was communicated to me by a colleague. She stated that at an invitational education workshop an enthusiastic participant was being unintentionally sexist in his remarks. She felt that to call attention to this would be perceived to be disinviting on her part. Obviously invitational education needs to go beyond enthusiastic sociability to caring communication if it is to deal with concrete and substantial issues. To disagree without being disagreeable is no easy task.

[3] The connection of skills, craft, and art and the carpenter analogy, was communicated to me by D. Bob Gowin of Cornell University. Perhaps an example of skills, craft, and art more appropriate to invitational education would be the learning of a language. A person must be able to know the vocabulary and grammar (skill) to be able to speak well in a variety of situations (craft). Art would involve being able to extend the conversation in creative and substantial ways.

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